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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 3348

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000053

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA ,PM/FO

ALSO FOR IO A/S HOOK, WARLICK

P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY

USUN FOR KHALILIZAD, WOLFF, SCHEDELBAUER

NSC FOR ABRAMS, YERGER, RAMCHAND, MCDERMOTT

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR MARR MOPS SY IR IS LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: DEFMIN MURR: WE ARE TAKING STEPS TO PREVENT ROCKET ATTACKS

Classified By: CDA William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Defense Minister Elias Murr on January 13 asked that the USG convey to Israel what the GOL is doing to prevent another rocket attack against Israel from Lebanese territory.

Murr said he had directed the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to cooperate with UNIFIL to control southern Lebanon and prevent a repetition of the January 8 rocket attack. The USG should urge Israel not to respond if, despite the LAF's efforts, there is another attack, because to do so would mean "falling into Iran's trap." On security for the June 7 national election, Murr said the LAF has tentatively developed its plan and is awaiting the plan of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) so that the two security forces can coordinate.

Regarding funding for the remainder of the U.S. M-60 tanks to be provided via third party transfer, Murr said he had agreement with PM Siniora to try to fund the \$75m cost from GOL funds, in order to preserve the "Saudi money" for other military needs. Charge and DATT met with Murr on January 13 at his home in Rabieh. End Summary.

JANUARY 8 ROCKET ATTACKS: WE ARE INVESTIGATING SERIOUSLY, BUT ISRAEL MUST NOT RESPOND IF THERE ARE FUTURE ATTACKS

¶2. (C) DefMin Murr said it was important that Israel recognize the actions the GOL is taking to prevent a repetition of the January 8 rocket attack. He asked that the USG convey that information to the Israelis. Israel not fall for the "Iranian trap" by responding if, despite GOL and UNIFIL efforts, there is another rocket attack from Lebanon, he said.

¶3. (C) Murr has assured UNIFIL commander Graziano that the LAF will provide UNIFIL whatever it asks for in order to adequately control the UNIFIL AOR and prevent another rocket attack. The LAF has already shifted some special operations troops to UNIFIL and is ready to take other actions that UNIFIL requests. Significantly, Murr said, he deliberately has placed the LAF forces under the command of Graziano, although the guidelines for UNIFIL call for LAF lead on joint operations. Murr said he did this as a sign of the GOL's commitment to work with UNIFIL to prevent future rocket attacks. LAF Commander Kahwagi will travel to the UNIFIL AOR in the coming days to reinforce that message.

4.(C) Murr said that following the January 8 attack, Lebanese authorities had detained a number of Palestinians for questioning, but this had produced "nothing." He said the

LAF G-2, the intelligence branch of the Internal Security Forces and UNIFIL all were involved in the investigation of the rocket attack. Asked who was behind the attack, Murr said he believed Hizballah had some responsibility, a view reinforced when the questioning of Palestinians produced nothing. Murr said he believes there is a genuine split between Syria and Iran, and Hizballah is in a difficult position as a result. While Hizballah would not want to carry out such a rocket attack, Iran might have pressured them to do so. So they got "some Palestinians" to do the job; if the perpetrators were caught, there would be no direct connection to Hizballah.

¶15. (C) Given this analysis, it would be a mistake, Murr said, for Israel to respond to any future attack because that would be doing what Iran hoped. "Let Israel know. . . if a rocket is thrown at them, do not respond; that would be falling into the Iranian trap."

LEBANESE GOVERNMENT MAY FUND THE REMAINING 56 M-60 TANKS

¶16. (C) DefMin Murr said he recently spoke with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora concerning the M-60 Tank agreement. Prime Minister (PM) Siniora was confused about some of the details of the agreement but Murr cleared that up, he said.

¶17. (C) On 12 January 2008, Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Lieutenant General Kahwagi signed a technical agreement for the first 10 tanks that is a lynch pin in successfully executing the M-60 Tank agreement. Specifically, it will spur the delivery of the first 10 tanks and hopefully spur funding by the UAE. Murr said that PM Siniora told him he

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expects to find domestic funding for the remaining 56 tanks. Additionally, Murr commented that the funding required was small. Murr explained that he preferred to preserve the "Saudi money" for other military needs.

ISF AND LAF SECURITY FOR 7 JUNE NATIONAL ELECTIONS

¶18. (C) DefMin Murr said the LAF has tentatively developed its plan and is awaiting the plan of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) so that the two security forces can coordinate. Murr said that the ISF will be responsible for security at polling locations; the LAF will handle perimeter security and provide a quick reaction force for the elections. Murr indicated he was concerned that LAF lacked the training to handle civilians. He also stressed the important of balancing all requirements and maintaining adequate troop levels to continue to support operations in the South.

¶19. (C) Murr said that he did not expect any large outbreaks of violence with Lebanon leading up to the elections on June 17. He did expect small confrontations between Shia and Sunni in villages where both live. Murr opined by time the Lebanese election occurs, many things will be clearer: the new U.S. administration will be settled, the directions of Syrian and Israeli talks will be known and the possibility of actions directed at the Iranian Nuclear program will be clear. Having more clarity on these issues will help the GOL authorities assess the risk of violence in Lebanon.

GRANT